



Opening Statement

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Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Susan W. Brooks (R-IN) Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response and Communications Committee on Homeland Security

“Assessing the State of Preparedness: A Federal, State, and Local Perspective”

Remarks as Prepared

This month marks the 12th anniversary of the tragic events of 9/11. And earlier this week we were once again reminded that tragedy can strike at any time. Our hearts go out to all those who were affected by the shootings at the Navy Yard. Our thoughts are also with the people of Colorado as they weather the historic flooding. We thank all the law enforcement, first responders, members of the military, and medical personnel who responded to these events.

Since 9/11 and to this day, preparing for and protecting against terrorist attacks, as well as other emergencies, has been a focus of our country and I know that many of us here today have dedicated our professional lives to making this nation more secure.

Make no mistake; over the past 12 years we have made significant progress in improving the nation’s ability to prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to, and recover from disasters. One needs only look at the Boston Marathon bombings, where we saw a coordinated and effective response from first responders, law enforcement, and medical personnel. Since 9/11, the city of Boston has used federal grant dollars to improve their prevention and response efforts; held training and exercises to test their plans; and promoted the use of interoperable communications across multiple jurisdictions and sectors. The actions of Boston’s first responders that day no doubt saved lives and mitigated damage. However, there is still a lot more work that needs to be done.

This country still needs to develop a process that defines and effectively measures our preparedness capabilities. FEMA has been assigned this difficult task and has been working toward this goal.

In order to help measure the nation’s preparedness, the Administration, in April 2011 publicly released Presidential Policy Directive 8 – National Preparedness. PPD-8 required that the Secretary of Homeland

Security submit to the President a national preparedness goal and a new national preparedness system that will help achieve the goal. It has been over two years since PPD-8 was released and we are still waiting to see the implementation of some of the critical components of the National Preparedness System.

Additionally, as required by the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act and PPD-8, FEMA released the 2nd annual National Preparedness Report (NPR) in March of this year. This report outlines the progress made in building and sustaining the nation's 31 core capabilities as defined in the National Preparedness Goal. It highlights several areas of national strength — including planning, operational coordination, and intelligence and information sharing — and it draws attention to areas in need of improvement — including cybersecurity, recovery-focused core capabilities, and public-private partnerships.

FEMA has released four of the five national planning frameworks, including prevention, response, recovery, and mitigation. These frameworks provide processes and strategies to assist in achieving the National Preparedness Goal.

In this hearing I am interested to learn the level of involvement State and local organizations had in the development of these frameworks, and how they are planning, if at all, to incorporate these frameworks into their daily operations.

Additionally, I am interested to learn when the final framework — the Protection framework — and the Federal Interagency Operations Plans will be released.

Preparedness is not just a responsibility of Federal, State, and local entities; individuals must also take a role in preparing for disasters. Since September is National Preparedness Month, of which I am a Congressional co-chair, it is important that we promote preparedness to our constituents, our communities, and our stakeholders. This month, I have encouraged Members of Congress to promote preparedness activities in their districts, and I recently introduced a resolution that designates this September as National Preparedness Month. But more must be done.

According to a 2012 survey by FEMA, 46 percent of respondents reported being familiar with their local hazards, but only 39 percent said that they have an emergency plan in place that they discussed with the household. This is very discouraging, and I'm hoping that with the new Preparedness Goal and System we can continue to educate individuals about the need to be prepared. After all, as FEMA has reminded us "winging it is not an emergency plan."

With the unpredictable nature of disasters and emergencies, it is vital that we, as a nation, continue to hone our preparedness capabilities. As Boston Police Commissioner Ed Davis stated at a House Homeland Security Committee hearing recently, "the truth of the matter is, nobody bats 1,000." I understand that we can't be fully prepared for every scenario, but we must strive to bat a 1,000.

Through this hearing, I hope to learn more about the strengths and weaknesses of our nation's state of preparedness, and also gain a greater understanding of how the nation is working together to build resilience. I look forward to hearing the perspectives of our witnesses on this important issue.

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